

Region 6 Citizens Advisory Council Minutes
January 11, 2011
Cottonwood Inn, Glasgow

CAC members present: Scott Billingsley, Tom Burch, Connie Iversen, Fran Buell, Mark Peterson, Darlyne Dascher, Steve Harada, Jim Carver, Bernie Hart, Jason Deming,

CAC members absent: Les Schaaf, Dustin Hill, Don Groven, Henry Gordon, Stan Lund

FWP staff present: Pat Gunderson, Steve Dalbey, Mark Sullivan, B.J. Kemp, Todd Anderson, Woody Baxter, Ron Selden, Eileen Ryce, Mike Herman, Michael "Mikey" Nye

Guests: Kirk Knudson, Saco; Steve Schindler, Glasgow; Gifford and Kay Fjeld, Hinsdale; Aaron Johnson, Fort Peck Field Station Manager, Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge

Pat Gunderson welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda. During the public comment section, Steve Schindler, representing himself and other Glasgow-area hunters, said he'd like to see special elk and mule deer permits restricted by area (the same as Hunting District 652 is now). The restrictions would be by FWP region or hunting district. He'd only like to see this change made in Region 6.

Mark Peterson asked what the downsides would be. He said there would be negative economic impacts to local communities if out-of-area hunters didn't come. Schindler said his proposal wouldn't change overall hunter numbers, only where the hunters come from.

The main issue, he said, is that many people who draw coveted big-game tags in Eastern Montana don't end up traveling out here to hunt, and the tags don't get used. If these changes were adopted, Schindler said more local residents would have a better chance of drawing the licenses.

Kirk Knudson has been a fur trapper for 40 years. While he's always had to deal with some level of theft of his gear, the problem has gotten noticeably worse in recent years. FWP needs to do a better job of letting the public know that it is illegal to tamper with an animal that is in a trap. He said the penalties also need to be discussed. Maybe the information could be included in hunter education classes?

Gifford Fjeld said hunters are still not harvesting enough antlerless deer. He suggested closing the last week of the general season for bucks. That would get rid of more does and keep more bucks around. Tom Burch said he's long suggested that FWP give out free doe "Deer B" tags when a hunter purchases a "Deer A" license.

Gifford asked about the differences between elk "A-9" and "B" permits. Mark Sullivan and Pat Gunderson explained the rationale behind the license changes. Fjeld added that

he's grown tired of all the extra fees FWP has, including the charge for accumulating bonus points in drawings. That process, he said, used to be free, and we should go back to that.

Continuing with the agenda, Eileen Ryce, FWP's aquatic invasive species (AIS) coordinator, presented a program on the recent invasion of Eurasian watermilfoil at the Dredge Cuts and in Fort Peck Reservoir. Scott Billingsley said FWP needs to be more proactive on the AIS issue and should be doing more public outreach, including putting photos of the plants in the media.

Pat Gunderson gave an update on state legislative issues and queried the group about how much information they'd like from us during the ongoing session. FWP staff will send CAC members the guidelines to be used when testifying or otherwise contacting legislators.

Gunderson also discussed the likely impacts from the passage of Initiative 161, which addresses the allocation of outfitter-sponsored big game licenses. Mark Peterson suggested that we review three years of data to determine the actual fiscal differences.

Peterson added that from what he's hearing from landowners, public access is not likely to increase because I-161 was approved. He's concerned that one result will be a reduction in funding for the Block Management (BMA) program.

Darlyne Dascher said many ranchers in her area are getting more upset with FWP over a variety of issues, especially bison. Because of the passage of I-161, some landowners are saying they may cancel their BMA contracts.

Several CAC members said they believed there was a lot of misinformation put before the public in the I-161 campaign. Scott Billingsley discussed why stock growers and others were against the measure. While one of the main goals of the proponents was to get more land opened up, landowners instead feel that they're losing even more rights. FWP staff noted that I-161 does not impact a landowner's right to charge access fees or lease to an outfitter.

Connie Iversen asked about FWP's relationships with nonprofit and other non-governmental (NGO) groups. Gunderson said we work with a variety of NGOs, and we try to be proactive as possible when cooperating with them on projects. Fran Buell asked how such partnerships are undertaken. Gunderson said the relationships are established based on common issues and goals, and memorandums of understanding, also known as MOUs, are typically developed by the parties so tasks and responsibilities are spelled out.

Michael Nye gave a report on Region 6 BMA activity. There were 65,000 hunter days in the Region in 2009, and it looks like the 2010 season had about the same number. There are more than 300 landowners signed up in the program in Region 6. That accounts for about 165 BMAs spread over about 1.3 million acres of land.

Several members engaged in a discussion about the BMA enrollment process, payment options and funding formulas. Nye confirmed that being in the BMA program automatically qualifies a cooperator for FWP game damage assistance.

Mark Peterson said lots of Flathead Valley hunters come to Blaine County and harvest big game. He's concerned that some of these animals are going to waste because he believes they're not taken care of properly in the field. Mark Sullivan noted that FWP has not seen this as an issue at the Havre check station.

FWP PROGRAM UPDATES

Region 6 program managers submitted written updates to members prior to the meeting. Steve Dalbey discussed the pending update of the Fort Peck Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan, the process and timelines for changing fishing regulations, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' annual operating plan for Fort Peck, and the development of a new Region 6 pond booklet that will detail public access, population survey and stocking histories.

Tom Burch asked about the rationale behind limits on the number of fishing rods that can be used on a given water body versus daily catch and possession limits. Steve said he didn't know the exact history behind those regulations.

Steve Dalbey added that it would be great if the CAC got involved in helping to develop upcoming proposed changes to the state's fishing regulations. Jim Carver said it would be helpful to have any proposals given to the group prior to the next CAC meeting.

Mark Sullivan reviewed the pending proposal to translocate up to 40 sage grouse to selected habitat in southern Alberta next spring. He also gave updates on the ongoing cross-boundary study of pronghorn antelope movement and swift fox.

Mark Peterson asked why sage grouse numbers have decreased north of Havre. Mark Sullivan said a lot of factors are likely at play, including altering sage brush habitat to cropland and West Nile disease.

CAC ROUNDTABLE

Scott Billingsley, Glasgow – There are increased problems with trespassing as shed-antler hunting becomes more popular, especially in the Milk River Valley. Some nonresidents are paying guides for antler hunting. Scott said he thinks there needs to be more restrictions on the practice and perhaps licensing.

Scott also addressed a proposal that would allow rifle hunting during the spring turkey season. He said that is a bad idea for a variety of reasons, including the fact that many

turkey hunters are using decoys and in camouflage that time of year. Scott said bison are actually an alternative form of livestock, even though they have status as wildlife, too.

Connie Iversen, Culbertson – She's heard lots of talk about the bison issue in her area. Landowners there are also seeing an overall increase in trespassing. She'd like more background information on proposed regulation changes as it becomes available. She thinks the new television programs on FWP wardens are very informative, as well as positive.

Connie noted that the new upland bird management plan is out for review. She's seeing lots of sharptails and pheasants around the Culbertson area this winter, but they seem to be having a rough time with all the snow. Deer numbers, especially does, appear to be down substantially.

Fran Buell, Gildford – She's also heard multiple complaints about trap theft and trapped animals being bothered. FWP needs to do more public service announcements about the problem. Fran also addressed the proposal to make trapper education mandatory. She said the Montana Trappers Association (MTA), which she represents, is in favor if there are actual classes created. The annual Youth Trappers Camp is set for June 10-12, 2011.

Fran asked about the potential transfer of predator control from the Department of Livestock to FWP. If that's actually being proposed, MTA is against it. The MTA's district meeting is set for April 10 at the Odd Fellows Hall in Saco.

Jason Deming, Sidney – Jason said there are lots of questions in the Sidney area about potential big game damage hunts. Lots of folks don't know much about the number of deer licenses that are sold each year, and many preferred the extended hunting seasons, rather than having management seasons incorporated into the general season. The 2010 early youth deer hunt was a good idea, but not that many people seemed to know about it.

He added that mountain lion numbers on the north side of the Yellowstone River seem to be increasing.

Mark Peterson, Havre – Mark asked what FWP can do to encourage more doe-deer harvest. Whitetail numbers may be down in his area north of Havre, or they've just spread out more because of the severe weather.

He sees lots of road hunting in his area. At least some of it is probably tied to folks trying to spot elk, which are few and hard to find. Mark said he feeds birds on his property.

Darlyne Dascher, Fort Peck – Deer numbers seem to be way down in her area south of Fort Peck. She's also seeing very few does and fawns. She'd like to see no over-the-counter mule deer licenses sold after the annual drawing.

Steve Harada, Wolf Point – Steve said he was stopped in the field twice during the past year. Each time the warden was very courteous. The Block Management program is very

successful, and he hopes I-161 doesn't harm the relations between landowners and hunters.

Anglers have asked for increased stocking of walleyes at Tiber Reservoir, but he's worried about the ability of the Fort Peck and Miles City hatcheries to produce the numbers being requested. He's also concerned that more stocking at Tiber could negatively impact stocking at Fresno, Nelson and Fort Peck reservoirs.

Jim Carver, Malta – Jim noted that Tiber Reservoir “opted out of” being on the list of water bodies where the state's warm water fishing stamp is needed. Revenue from the stamp helps fund operations at the Fort Peck Hatchery. He added that fishing on Nelson and Fort Peck reservoirs was excellent last fall.

Jim said that many young-of-the-year fish are stranded when the irrigation district shuts the water off at Nelson Reservoir. The district is willing to coordinate the shut-off so FWP can move the fish.

Jim said Deer numbers seems to be down in southern Phillips County, and there are too many deer in the town of Malta.

Bernie Hart, Hinsdale – He noticed lots of hunters from new areas of Montana this past season, including as far as West Yellowstone. Bernie said there seems to be a lot more mountain lions in southern Phillips County than most people realize. He added that he thinks it's a bad idea to allow high-powered rifles to be used for turkeys during the spring season.

TRAPPING DEMONSTRATION

Fran Buell made a presentation on basic trapping techniques and gear.

IMPROVING HUNTER ETHICS

Tom Burch asked the group to come up with ways that ethics can be more strongly incorporated into FWP's hunter education program.

The biggest problem, he said, seems to be the gap between the time a youngster completes hunter education and the time they get their driver's license and are able to hunt on their own or with friends in the field.

Fran suggested that hunter education camps could be created for these older children, and they could be certified upon completion. MTA camps are open to families, so they serve as a learning opportunity for all age levels. Pat Gunderson said the training could potentially be like a graduated driver's license, where the youth is given more freedom over time.

Bernie Hart and Mark Peterson said they agreed that more needs to be done with this age group to promote ethical behavior, but it's hard to figure out exactly how to do it. Connie Iversen said she thinks the key is getting adults to be good role models. Unfortunately, there are a lot of bad examples out there.

Bernie made a motion, seconded by Connie, to adopt a resolution stating that FWP's hunter education program needs to be reviewed with an eye toward increased teaching about ethics, particular for older youths.

Scott Billingsley suggested that meeting agendas be loosened a bit so there's more time for discussion. He also said the group should be more involved in pending legislation that affects hunters, anglers and FWP operations.

Pat Gunderson reviewed the CAC's advisory role and said more authority is not likely to be granted for such groups because of the way they've been set up.

The next CAC meeting is scheduled for June 14 at the Fort Peck Hatchery. Please submit potential agenda items to Pat Gunderson or Ron Selden beforehand.

FWP STAFF ACTION ITEMS:

- Send CAC members weekly legislative updates and the guidelines to be used when testifying or otherwise contacting legislators
- Email link to statewide upland bird management plan to all CAC members
- Provide background information on proposed regulation changes to Connie Iversen
- Distribute meeting's guest speaker contact information to members
- Send Tom Burch's letter and the CAC hunter education resolution to FWP leaders in Helena
- Get proposed fishing regulation changes to CAC members before their June meeting

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